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What Happened Afterwards? Change and Continuity in the Hungarian Elite between 1988 and 2009

Luca Kristóf*

Abstract: »Was passierte danach? Kontinuität und Wandel der Ungarischen Elite zwischen 1988 und 2009«. This article examines social continuity and discontinuity in the Hungarian political, economic and cultural elites between 1988 and 2009. In these two decades, four empirical surveys (five among the economic elite) have been carried out at the Institute for Political Science of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences to explore the composition, recruitment, lifestyle, and attitudes of different elite groups. This large amount of data (4773 persons, in total) allows us to follow long term trends not yet analysed and distinguish between several types of social processes in the Hungarian elite. The analysis complements but also augments some of the main findings of the earlier literature on elite circulation and reproduction under post-communism.

Keywords: elites, transformation, Post-Communism, Hungary.

Hungarian elite change in the post-communist transition period was studied extensively in the 1990s. Summarising the numerous empirical research findings, Iván Szelényi and his colleagues differentiated between the circulation of the political elite and the reproduction of the economic elite (Szelényi and Szelényi 1995, Szelényi et al. 1995). John Higley and his co-authors, though admitting segmental differences, argued that Hungarian elite change as a whole could be considered a classical elite circulation in a comparative perspective (Dogan and Higley 1998, Higley and Lengyel 2000). However, empirical interest in the subject has waned since the end of the 1990s, and the long(er) term consequences of elite change have remained by and large unexplored. I propose that it is time to revisit the findings of earlier studies and examine in a broader historical perspective whether the outcomes of elite change have proved to be stable and the processes identified have continued in the directions anticipated. Analysing several quantitative databases comprising two decades, I follow the most important trends up to the present. I differentiate between three types of social processes in the elite:

- (i) Long term social continuity;
- (ii) Discontinuity related to elite circulation during the system change;

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- (iii) Long term social changes not related to elite circulation during the system change.

I argue that elite segments differed not only in the extent of circulation during the system change but a long term divergence between them can also be observed. The political elite changed little after the period of political transformation and was characterised up to 2009 by the ‘survival of system transformers’. By contrast, both the economic elite and the cultural elite underwent significant changes between 1993 and 2009. Thus, more recent data shed new light on the dynamics of post-communist elite change. I propose that some of the still relevant statements of transformational studies should be augmented.

Before embarking on the empirical analysis, I clarify the notion of elite continuity and review the main arguments about the post-communist transformation of the Hungarian elite.

Elite Transformation in Hungary

Gabriella Ilonszki (Ilonszki 2003) differentiates between four approaches to elite continuity. The first and most simple approach focuses on *personal continuity*. This approach is of particular importance in the time of great social and political transformations. The second approach deals with the level of *social continuity*. It examines similarities and differences in terms of socio-demographic characteristics between old and new elites, rather than explore the individual career paths of elite members. The third approach focuses on *structural continuity*, i.e. the inner structural changes of the elite. At the highest level of abstraction, the *system theory* approach deals with the connections between elite configurations and the nature of the political system.

The problem of elite continuity was present in the analysis of the political transformation of 1989-90 from the very beginning. The main focus of inquiry was on the personal continuity of the political and economic elite. The seminal research question of the transition period was asked by Szelényi and Szelényi (Szelényi and Szelényi 1995) and had originated in Pareto’s classical work (Pareto 1963) on elite circulation: Was the circulation of the elites (broad personal changes) or the reproduction of the elites (personal continuity) more characteristic of the social transformation in East-European societies?

Theories about personal elite continuity (e.g. ‘grand coalition’ by Hankiss 1989; ‘political capitalism’ by Staniszki 1991) generally postulated that the socialist nomenclature managed, with the help of power networks, to guard their positions or convert them to economic capital, and thus became the true winners of the transformation. Erzsébet Szalai’s concept of ‘capital conversion’ (Szalai 1999) linked the conservation of power and the management of economic transformation to the group of technocrats. The conflict of this well-educated and relatively young fraction of the nomenclature with the old bureaucratic elite during the eighties became one of the main factors that gener-

ated social changes. According to Szalai, this technocratic elite – *ab ovo* open to liberalism and market economy – became an extremely successful capital-converter in the process of economic transformation due to its cultural capital.

In 1993, a comparative international survey helped to test these hypotheses on elite continuity. Relying on data from six Eastern-European countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland and Russia), researchers found that changes in the political elite could be described best as circulation, while changes in the economic elite were more aptly characterised as reproduction. The reproduction of the nomenclature elite in the political sphere was blocked by serious social barriers; the preservation of political power was an existing but not typical phenomenon (Szelényi et al. 1995, Eyal and Townsley 1995, Böröcz and Róna-Tas 1995).

What did these results mean in the Hungarian context? In Hungary, one third of the economic elite of 1993 had been in top economic positions already before the system change, while a further 50 per cent had held lower but still managerial positions. 30 per cent of the elite of 1988 remained economic leaders by 1993, while 23 per cent of them experienced downward mobility and 46 per cent retired. Signifying the greater circulation of the political elite, 78 per cent of the old nomenclature elite were downwardly mobile by 1993. The cultural elite proved to be the segment least touched by the transformation period. Regarding the whole Hungarian elite, 20 per cent of the old nomenclature elite guarded their elite positions, and 33 per cent of the new elite had been members of the communist nomenclature. Meanwhile, 56 per cent of the cultural elite of 1988 managed to stay in position by 1993. The main social characteristics of the cultural elite, contrary to the other two elite segments, did not change much between 1988 and 1993. This suggested that new elite members coming from sub-elite positions simply filled the ‘open spaces’ (Szelényi et al. 1995).

The international survey in 1993 compared Hungarian elite circulation to Polish and Russian data. Among these three countries, Hungary showed the greatest degree of elite circulation within all elite segments. The researchers argued that, though the selection of the Hungarian elite in the late communist period had been more meritocratic than in the other two countries, the new Hungarian political elite attributed greater symbolic importance to elite change and accelerated circulation by administrative means. As a consequence, calculations based on data as of 1993 overestimated elite circulation: a certain degree of restoration took place in the Hungarian elite after the forced circulation initiated by the first democratic government (Szelényi et al. 1995).

Later comparative analysis qualified the view that elite circulation was especially strong in Hungary. In a study on the Hungarian, Polish and Czechoslovakian nomenclature elites, Jacek Wasilewski concluded that though the members of the old elite in all three societies had been exiled from top political positions, roughly half of them still managed to maintain elite status – albeit not in the same position as in the communist era. If elderly nomenclature mem-

bers who retired were excluded, two thirds of the old elite still held elite positions in 1993 (Wasilewski 1998). These results led to the framing of the new notion of replacement circulation (Higley and Lengyel 2000).

Which groups within the communist elite managed to survive democratic transformation? A few years later, still using evidence from the international elite study of 1993, Iván Szelényi and his co-authors argued that cultural capital played a leading role in the transition period (Eyal, Szelényi and Townsley 1998). Their main point was that cultural capital was the most important type of capital used to reach elite status, power and privilege in the post-communist transition period. In line with Szalai's concept of 'capital conversion', they contended that political capital was secondary and worked only in conjunction with cultural capital – in the case of late communist technocracy.

By the time of the millennium, all the important empirical research findings had been published about East-European elite circulation. Summarizing the results of earlier studies, John Higley and György Lengyel (Higley and Lengyel 2000) categorised the Hungarian (and also the Polish and the Czechoslovakian) system change as a classic case of elite circulation according to the model of Higley and Pakulski (Higley and Pakulski 1999). The mode of circulation was gradual and peaceful, while its scope was wide and deep enough to filter out unfit elite members and allow new social groups to join the elite.¹

Although the scholarly interest in elite continuity decreased after the 1990s, positional elite surveys have been periodically repeated at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The sampling has been designed so as to sustain comparability with the original survey in 1993² (Table 1).

Table 1: Elite Surveys Between 1993 and 2009 (N)

Studied elite group	1988*	1993	1997	2001	2009
Political elite	523	124	-	142	407
Economic elite	102	578	582	482	457
Cultural elite	187	159	-	213	203

*The elite of 1988 was interviewed in 1993, together with the elite of 1993

¹ Higley and his co-authors also contributed to the *system theory* level approach of Eastern European elite continuity, describing the Hungarian system change as an adaptive elite settlement (Higley et al. 1996).

² The sample of the political elite was taken from the 'Handbook of Hungarian Public Life' that registers members of the government, MPs, leading bureaucrats of ministries, mayors and leaders of the most important social organisations. The economic elite sample contains top managers from the Hoppenstedt-Bonnier firm register. The cultural elite sample includes members of the Academy of Sciences, university rectors, leaders of research institutes, leaders of publishing houses and the media. Detailed sampling methods are available from the author.

This study is the first attempt to compare these databases to one another.³ The data allow us track *social continuity and discontinuity* in the Hungarian elite between 1988 and 2009.

Social Continuity in the Hungarian Elite Between 1988 and 2009

The basic demographic characteristics of the Hungarian elite are rather similar to the European average: the vast majority of them are highly educated, middle-aged males. However, it is striking that the proportion of women in the political elite has not increased significantly during the past two decades (see Table 2). In the meantime, the share of women in the economic and cultural elites, starting from a very low level in 1988, more than doubled by 2009. Nevertheless, the proportion of female elite members in all elite segments is still under 20 per cent.

Table 2: Gender (percent)

	1988	1993	2001	2009
Political elite				
male	82.6	88.1	89.4	83.7
female	17.4	11.9	10.6	16.3
Total	100	100	100	100
Economic elite				
male	94.1	93.4	91	85.6
female	5.9	6.6	9	14.4
Total	100	100	100	100
Cultural elite				
male	95.2	93.7	85	83.3
female	4.8	6.3	15	16.7
Total	100	100	100	100

The mean age of elite members is shown in Table 3. It may be surprising that the elite of the late communist period was not significantly older than subsequent elite groups. However, it overlaps with the findings of György Lengyel (Lengyel 2003). Lengyel argued that the transformation of the nomenclature elite had already started in the 1980s: the fluctuation accelerated to a pace one and a half times faster than in the earlier communist period. The new elite members were of younger age and came from families with higher social status. In the 1990s, the mean age of the economic and cultural elite segments did not change considerably. During the whole period studied, cultural elite

³ For the analysis of 2001 data see Csurgó et al. 2001, Kovách 2002. Data of 2009: Kovách 2011 (in Hungarian).

proved to be the oldest group with its constant mean age around 57-58 years. By 2009, a somewhat ageing political elite overtook the economic elite which is still slightly under 50 years.

Table 3: Mean Age (year)

	1988	1993	2001	2009
Political elite	48.6	47.9	52.9	54.4
Economic elite	52.2	48.1	49	49.8
Cultural elite	57.8	57.9	56.6	58.2

Table 4: Birth Cohorts (percent)

Political elite	1988	1993	2001	2009
-1929	15.7	5.2	6.3	2.1
1930-39	33.1	21.6	12.0	3.6
1940-49	35.2	39.2	36.6	26.6
1950-59	13.6	27.8	32.4	38.8
1960-69	2.5	6.2	7.7	18.3
1970-	0	0	4.9	10.6
Total	100	100	100	100

Economic elite	1988	1993	2001	2009
-1929	14.7	1.4	0.6	0
1930-39	56.9	22.1	7.3	1.1
1940-49	27.5	50.7	32.1	15.8
1950-59	1.0	24.4	39.8	36.0
1960-69	0	1.4	16.9	28.1
1970-	0	0	3.3	19.1
Total	100	100	100	100

Cultural elite	1988	1993	2001	2009
-1929	48.1	28.9	12.2	4.4
1930-39	36.4	32.7	16	9.9
1940-49	13.4	28.9	36.2	30.5
1950-59	2.1	8.8	26.3	33.3
1960-69	0	0.6	7.5	16.2
1970-	0	0	1.9	5.4
Total		100	100	100

If we take a look at the cohorts of the elite (Table 4), we can see that at the time of the first three surveys the cohort born between 1940 and 1949 was the most populous one in the political elite. The younger members of this cohort belong to the baby boomers, i.e. the cohort who epitomized the cultural change of the 1960s. This cohort has been called ‘the great generation’ in Hungary, and, being in their forties at the time of the system change, they did their share in shaping the new Hungarian democracy. A generational change finally occurred between 2001 and 2009, when this cohort lost its leading part in favour of the next cohort born between 1950 and 1959. However, the ‘great generation’ still composed more than one fourth of the Hungarian political elite in 2009. In the

cultural elite, which is considerably older than the other the segments, members of the ‘great generation’ came into elite positions in the early nineties and still consisted the second largest cohort by 2009. In the economic elite, there seems to be no such distinguished generation; the shifts between cohorts have been more even and gradual.

The education level of the Hungarian elite in the whole studied period has been very high (Table 5). The share of university or college graduates is above 90 percent in the political elite.⁴ The political elite of 1988 was not an exception to this rule. Contrary to the communist ideology of (manual) workers’ domination, the share of graduates was extremely high. However, the elite of 1993 with 97.9 per cent of graduates surpasses even the late communist political elite. The first democratic parliament and government were often labelled as ‘amateur intellectuals’ in politics. Later, the share of graduates fell back to the earlier – still very high – level.

In the late communist period, virtually all members of the economic and cultural elites held university or college degrees. The *per definitionem* very high educational level of the cultural elite has not changed since, while the share of graduates in the economic elite decreased. This is probably the impact of economic transformation: a group of self-made entrepreneurs gradually found their way into the capitalist elite (see Csizse and Kovách 1999)

Table 5: Education Level (per cent)

Political elite	1988	1993	2001	2009
University degree	91.2 ⁵	97.9	80.3	74.6
College degree			9.9	17.7
Lower	8.8	2.1	9.8	7.7
Total	100	100	100	100

Economic elite	1988	1993	2001	2009
University degree	99	93.1	62.4	64.1
College degree			25.4	23.4
Lower	1	6.9	12.2	12.5
Total	100	100	100	100

Cultural elite	1988	1993	2001	2009
University degree	100	98.1	88.3	86.2
College degree			10.3	11.8
Lower	0	1.9	1.4	2
Total	100	100	100	100

The binary variable of father’s occupation (manual/non-manual) offers a rough proxy for measuring the social composition of different elite segments. This

⁴ Another specific feature is the high share of elite members holding technical degrees (Iloncszki 2012).

⁵ In the survey of 1993, the type of tertiary education was not specified.

variable suggests a closing of the Hungarian elite during the past two decades (Table 6). In the late communist period, the majority of fathers had manual jobs in all three segments of the elite. The economic elite was most open in terms of social mobility: more than 70 per cent of this elite group had fathers who had been manual workers. Obviously, the share of non-manual workers in the population decreases as we go back in time. Nevertheless, the huge difference between the composition of the elites in 1988 and 1993 is striking. After the political transformation, ideologically forced social mobility lost its effect. As a consequence, by 1993 the share of manual workers among the fathers of the political elite members fell by 24.6 per cent. The same tendency occurred in the economic elite (a decrease by 14.5 per cent) and the cultural elite (19.1 per cent). By the time of the millennium, the proportion of non-manual working fathers was above 60 per cent in all elite segments. Their share in the cultural elite – always the most closed in terms of origin – reached 70 per cent. This rather closed composition seems to be steady – the relative shares of fathers with manual and non-manual occupation did not change between 2001 and 2009.

Table 6: Father's Occupation (when respondent was 14 year old) (per cent)

Political elite	1988	1993	2001	2009
Non-manual	33.4	58	61.1	62.6
Manual	66.6	42	38.9	37.4
Total	100	100	100	100

Economic elite	1988	1993	2001	2009
Non-manual	29.3	43.8	61.8	62.7
Manual	70.7	56.2	38.2	37.3
Total	100	100	100	100

Cultural elite	1988	1993	2001	2009
Non-manual	46.6	65.4	71.7	71.8
Manual	53.4	34.5	28.3	28.2
Total	100	100	100	100

The most frequent measure for the continuity between communist and post-communist elites is former Communist Party (MSZMP) membership. Table 7 shows the declining share of MSZMP-members in the Hungarian elite. In 1988, more than 80 per cent of the political and the economic elite were members of the party; while this proportion in the cultural elite was slightly lower (71.2 per cent). The greatest fall – signifying the greatest elite circulation – affected the political elite: the share of (former) members of the CP dropped by more than 50 per cent by 1993. The decrease was more moderate in the other two elite segments (around 17 per cent). However, since the early 1990s, the share of former CP members in the political elite has not changed. In 2009, still one third of them had been a member of the MSZMP. In the case of the economic

elite, the decrease in former CP membership is in line with the gradual generational change noticeable in Table 4. The share of former CP members fell from exactly two thirds in 1993 to 27.3 per cent in 2001, and further decreased to 19.6 per cent by 2009. In the cultural elite, the presence of the great generation was still palpable in the second decade of the period, when the proportion of former CP members was still around 30 per cent.

Table 7: Former Member of the CP (per cent)

	1988	1993	2001	2009
Political elite	86.2	34.7	33.8	31.8
Economic elite	84.2	66.6	27.3	19.6
Cultural elite	71.2	54.4	34.7	30.4

Another possible measure for continuity is the share of elite members who had been in managing positions in 1988. A managing position (according to ISCO-classification) does not necessarily mean an elite position. For example, a head of department at a firm or a university, though not a top leader, was also classified as manager. These kinds of positions constitute a sub-elite status in one's career path. Using this measure (Table 9), trends are more or less the same as in the case of former CP membership. 41.9 per cent of the political elite in 1993 had been in managing positions already in 1988. In line with the share of former CP membership, this proportion did not change much subsequently. In 2009, 41.6 per cent of the political elite still consisted of late communist managers. 76.8 per cent of the 1993 economic elite had held managing positions in the late communist period. After the early nineties, this proportion decreased to two thirds in 2001 and less than half in 2009. In the cultural elite, one third of the 1993 elite had been managers already in 1988. During the last two decades, this proportion slightly decreased further.

Comparing the three elite segments, it is striking that while the rate of former CP members (Table 7) was lowest (19.6 per cent), while the share of former managers (Table 8) was highest (45 per cent) in the economic elite of 2009. This difference shows the less political and more professional nature of the economic elite's career paths.

Table 8: Managers in 1988 (per cent)

	1988	1993	2001	2009
Political elite	63.9	41.9	44.3	41.6
Economic elite	95	76.8	63.7	45
Cultural elite	53.3	33.6	25.4	28.4

The survey of 1993 allows us also to look at the survival of the elite of 1988 as later managers. (The reason is that this survey interviewed members of the 1988 elite in 1993. Unfortunately, we cannot follow them beyond 1993.). The results presented in Table 9 overlap with the earlier findings of elite circulation

studies (Szelényi et al. 1995). In the economic and cultural elites, the same percentage of the elite members of 1988 were still in managing positions in 1993 as that of the new elite of 1993. Between 1988 and 1993, a significant change occurred only in the political elite. Regarding the political elite, Table 9 also corroborates the thesis of replacement circulation (Wasilewski 1998, Higley and Lengyel 2000): almost two thirds of the late socialist political elite, though exiled from top political positions, stayed in managerial positions by 1993.

Table 9: Managers in 1993

	Elite of 1988	Elite of 1993
Political elite	62	85,4
Economic elite	95,7	94,9
Cultural elite	37,8	39,4

What is the significance of continuity of the late communist elite in 2012, twenty years after the system change? After twenty years of post-communism, approximately every third member of the Hungarian political and cultural elite, and every fifth member of the economic elite was a former member of the CP, and even more of them had been in controlling positions in the late Kádár-era. In the absence of comparative data from other post-communist societies, it is hard to judge whether this share is high or low, yet it surely seems to be a stabilizing factor in the political elite (and partly in the cultural elite, too).

Consequences are mainly political. The rhetoric of the currently governing right-wing Fidesz party is about closing the era of post-communism with a kind of new 'revolution'. Anti-establishment parties and movements are also eager to mention continuity, especially radical rightists of the Jobbik party.

Let us take a look at the party sympathies of the Hungarian elite in 2009. Table 10 contains only the two biggest political parties: Socialist Party (MSZP) and the main right-wing party (Fidesz) because support for the new anti-establishment (radical right and green) parties was not yet measureable in the elite. In 2009, 23.4 per cent of the political elite would have voted for the Socialist Party. This rate was significantly higher (43.5 per cent) among former CP members. Among the supporters of the largest right-wing party, Fidesz, correlation was the inverse: while 27.4 of the elite would have voted for that party, this proportion among former CP members was as low as 13.4 per cent. In the other two elite segments, the Socialist Party was less popular (especially in the economic elite) but the correlations had the same direction: former members of the CP were still significantly overrepresented among socialist voters.

Table 10: Party Sympathy and Former CP Membership in 2009

Political elite	Former Member of the CP		
Party sympathy in 2009	No	Yes	Total
Socialist party (MSZP)	13.8	43.8	23.4
Right-wing party (Fidesz)	33.9	13.4	27.4

Economic elite	Former Member of the CP		
Party sympathy in 2009	No	Yes	Total
Socialist party (MSZP)	8	23.2	10.9
Right-wing party (Fidesz)	28.3	9.8	24.7

Cultural elite	Former Member of the CP		
Party sympathy in 2009	No	Yes	Total
Socialist party (MSZP)	9	37.9	17.8
Right-wing party (Fidesz)	32.3	13.8	26.7

Examining the correspondence between party sympathy, former CP membership and former managing position in the late communist era, regression analysis (controlling for socio-demographic variables) showed that CP membership is a better measurement of continuity at the level of political sympathies. A former managing position did not affect democratic party sympathy in the elite. However, in two elite segments it correlated with a broader and more lasting measure of political attitudes: self-classification on the left-right scale. Holders of former managing positions – and of course former CP members – were significantly more leftist in the political and economic elite in 2009. In the cultural elite, only former CP membership affected self-positioning along the left-right scale.

Discussion

Summarising the observed changes in the Hungarian elite from 1988 to 2009, three types of processes could be identified.

- 1) *Long term social continuity*. In some aspects, Hungarian elites in the last two decades have kept the characteristics of the late communist elite.
- 2) *Social discontinuity related to elite circulation*. Some aspects of the elite seriously changed at the time of democratic transformation, due to elite circulation. Based on the analysis of data from the second decade of the studied period, two subtypes can be distinguished within this type of process:
 - 2.a. Some characteristics of the elite that changed largely due to elite circulation during the system change continued to change in a trend-like fashion in the second half of the period.
 - 2.b. Some characteristics of the elite that changed largely due to elite circulation during the system change did not change (significantly) after the transition period.

- 3) *Long term social changes not related to elite circulation.* Some characteristics of the elite were not really affected by the system change and have varied usually due to generational changes.

Generally speaking, the political elite was characterised by the 1st and 2nd 'b' types of processes. The third type was more typical of the economic elite, while the cultural elite was somewhere in between, characterised in some aspects by 2nd 'b' trends but more often by the third type, similarly to the economic elite.

Political Elite

The share of women and graduates in the Hungarian political elite belong in the category of social characteristics that show long term continuity in the studied period. The extremely high proportion of graduates seems to be a comparative specificity of Hungarian politics. Though the chances of women to get into the elite slightly increased during the last decade, there is still a serious representational deficit of women in politics compared to West-European averages (see Ilonszki 2004).

The continuing presence of the 'great generation' of the 1960s is also a conspicuous characteristic of the Hungarian political elite. The relatively low mean age of the late communist elite questions the stereotype of the gerontocratic communist nomenclature. Though holders of top political positions were mainly seniors, members of the broader elite were definitely middle-aged, in their forties, not older than their counterparts after the democratic transformation. Circulation in the political elite did not mean a real generational change, rather the coming into power of other groups of the same – great – generation. The cementing of this generation caused a perceptible ageing in the Hungarian political elite in the second decade of the post-communist period.

The three most important discontinuous characteristics of the political elite were former CP membership, former managing position in late communism and social origin. The first two attributes are obviously linked to personal circulation of the old nomenclature elite. The extreme decrease of these specificities was the direct consequence of democratic transformation. Changes in social origin – namely, the decreasing share of non-manual workers among the fathers of elite members – indicated the different social background of new elite groups after the democratic transformation. The shift in social composition is at least partially due to the inclusion of earlier excluded social groups into the new political elite. However, the truly interesting nature of these three discontinuous attributes of the political elite is that they all belong to the 2.b. subtype of their category: after the dramatic change of the transition period they have not changed further at all. In 2009, still every third member of the political elite was a former CP member, exactly as in 1993. In terms of personal continuity, we can speak of the *survival of system transformers*, coming from both late communist and new democratic elite groups, who shaped Hun-

garian political life throughout the post-communist decades to a very great extent.

Economic and Cultural Elites

The economic and cultural elites of the late communist era were the most educated and most male-dominated groups among all the elite samples studied. They were virtually composed only of male graduates. Researchers of the transition period argued that the selection criteria of the Hungarian economic and cultural elites in the 1980s were rather meritocratic (with the exception of people openly criticising the communist system). However, the very low share of women in these elite segments questions the common belief that the period of communist modernization provided women with equal chances in career building. The changes in the proportion of women in the economic and cultural elites are clear examples for long term social changes not particularly related to the system change. The share of female elite members started to increase only in the second post-communist decade. Although still very low, it more than doubled from its starting level and seems to converge to West-European rates. As for education, the economic elite shows a similarly gradual, long term change: the share of graduates is returning to a more 'normal' level. In the cultural elite, the proportion of graduates is continuous and a university or college degree seems to be permanent standard.

While the economic and cultural elites have become more open to women during the last two decades, in terms of social origin they have become more closed. Similarly to the political elite, the share of elite members whose fathers had a non-manual job increased in the studied period. In this sense, there is a clear discontinuity between the communist and post-communist elites in all elite segments. In 1988, the share of manual working fathers was above 50 per cent in all segments. This proportion fell dramatically after the system change: the new members clearly came from families with higher status. As I mentioned above, in the case of the political elite this change could be linked to political transformation: social groups dispreferred by communist ideology streamed into the elite. However, in the case of economic elite, the rate of members with a higher status background increased gradually with every new generation, and seems to have reached a new equilibrium after the millennium, independently of political changes. In this respect, changes in the cultural elite resembled the political rather than the economic elite: it became socially more closed after the system change but the rate of members with a lower social background did not much change afterwards.

From the aspect of discontinuity, the economic elite is the antithesis of political elite. Indicating lower circulation, the share of former CP members and late communist managers decreased much less between 1988 and 1993 than in the political elite. However, in the long run it fell gradually and reached a com-

paratively low level by 2009. The cultural elite can be placed in between the economic and political elites. It was affected less by the system change than the political elite, and the share of former CP members and former managers gradually decreased in the first decade of post-communism, yet later halted at a level higher than in the economic elite. This difference may be caused by the permanent presence of a distinguished ‘great generation’ detected not only in political, but also in cultural elite.

Conclusion

What can explain the variance of processes of change across different segments of the Hungarian elite? One explanatory factor is the law of elite circulation itself. Regarding continuity between communist and post-communist elites, Ilonszki stresses that different elite segments of a non-democratic system show varying degrees of ability to survive, and members of the political elite have particularly weak chances to survive (Ilonszki 2003). This explains the greater discontinuity of the political elite. However, it does not explain why changes in the political elite halted afterwards. It seems that, after the great trauma of democratic transformation, further changes in the political elite did not keep up with changes in the other two segments. The social attributes of the Hungarian political elite barely changed between 1993 and 2009. Even normal generational changes seem to have been blocked. At the same time, the economic and cultural elites, originally affected less by the system change, grew gradually less and less post-communist, and converged to the elites of stable democracies (at least in their basic social character).

Nowadays, debates on the communist legacy are more salient in the public life of Hungary than ten years ago. Due to widely perceived democratic deficit (see Lengyel and Ilonszki 2010), the performance of the political elite is being questioned once again. However, long term empirical data suggest that, twenty years after the transformation, the ‘survival of transformers’, i.e. the continuity of the post-communist elite may be a factor at least as relevant as the survival of parts of the communist elite.

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